

WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. A device for clamping and ablating cardiac tissue comprising:

a first handle member;

a second handle member;

first and second mating jaw members associated with the first and second handle members, the jaw members being movable by the handle members between a first open position spaced from the fixed jaw member and a second clamped position;

a first elongated electrode extending along the first jaw member;

a second elongated electrode extending along the second jaw member;

the first and second electrodes being adapted to be connected to an RF energy source so that, when activated, the first and second electrodes are of opposite polarity; and at least one of the jaw members being biased by a spring so as to urge the jaw members toward the clamped position with a force that increases as the separation of the jaws increases.

2. The device of claim 1 wherein the drive member has a proximal and a distal end, the distal end supporting the moveable jaw and the proximal end being received in a carriage member slidably supported in one of the first and second handle members, the spring being located interior of the carriage member.

3. The device of claim 2 further comprising an adjustable screw associated with the carriage member for selectively varying the degree to which the spring is compressed.

4. The device of claim 2 wherein the carriage includes an exterior step and further comprising a latch pivotally secured to one of the first and second handle members for selectively engaging the exterior step, whereby the drive member is locked in position with respect to the handle members.

5. A tissue grasping apparatus comprising:

first and second grasping jaws, one of the grasping jaws being relatively moveable between a first, open position spaced from the other jaw and a closed position in proximity to the other jaw; each jaw including a raised electrode and a receding clamping surface in face-to-face relation with the electrode and clamping surface of the other jaw; the clamping surfaces of the jaws comprising an insulating material and the raised, face-to-face electrodes being of opposite polarity and connectible to a power source for providing an electrical current between the electrodes, whereby when tissue is grasped between said clamping surfaces, the electrodes are substantially entirely contacted by the tissue; and

the moveable jaw being supported on a drive member having a proximal end and a distal end, the drive member being biased by a spring so as to urge the moveable jaw toward the closed position.

6. The device of claim 5 wherein the drive member has

a proximal and a distal end, the distal end supporting the moveable jaw and the proximal end being received in a carriage member slidably supported in one of the first and second handle members, the spring being located interior of the carriage member.

7. The device of claim 6 further comprising an adjustable screw associated with the carriage member for selectively varying the degree to which the spring is compressed.

8. The device of claim 6 wherein the carriage includes an exterior step and further comprising a latch pivotally secured to one of the first and second handle members for selectively engaging the exterior step, whereby the drive member is locked in position with respect to the handle members.